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Current Comment

RANSOM OR DEBT? ~~30~~

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It looks as if the United States government has agreed to provide up to \$13 million dollars to help purchase the release of 1,113 Bay of Pigs prisoners who are still held in Cuba.

There has been no confirmation from the White House, but there are many signs of the administration's direct interest in the negotiations between Castro and James B. Donovan. He is nominally the agent of the Cuban Families committee but represented the Central Intelligence agency in negotiating the release of the U-2 pilot, Francis Gary Powers.

It was almost inevitable that, sooner or later, the chicken hatched at the Bay of Pigs would come home to roost on Mr. Kennedy's lap. There is no easy way for him to dispose of it. The administration's moral obligations to the prisoners and their families is clear. It was on the assurance of our air support that the rebels undertook to invade Cuba in April, 1961, and it was Mr. Kennedy's last minute change of heart that led to the invasion's collapse.

Several members of Congress have already denounced the proposed payment as ransom, which it surely is. To say that the government's share of the payment will be disguised as food and medicine does not alter the fact that it is ransom and that it is being put up by the United States government — even tho the President declared in May, 1961, when urging Americans to contribute to the private fund headed by Mrs. Roosevelt and Dr. Milton Eisenhower, that "the United States government has not been and cannot be a party to these negotiations."

Here is a sad precedent indeed to set before other two-bit dictators who, having milked up for whatever they can legitimately, may want to increase their take.

What makes the precedent even worse is the success with which Castro has managed to keep raising his price. First it was 500 tractors. When the Roosevelt-Eisenhower committee seemed about to produce these, it became 500 tractors worth 28 million dollars. When Castro subsequently began talking in terms of 1,000 tractors, the committee disbanded. Now, we are told, the agreement reached between Mr. Donovan and Castro calls for a total payment of about 62 million dollars.

Before public money is committed to bail the administration out of a moral predicament which it brought on itself, we are entitled to the assurance that every private source which has an interest in the matter (among which we might mention the Kennedy family) has given its full share.